

Political Playback: California Capitol News You Might Have Missed

Bo Tefu and Antonio Ray Harvey | California Black Media

State Dem Convention: Nichelle Henderson Stuns Field, Topping Delegate Vote in Superintendent of Public Instruction Race

Black Democratic candidates walked away from this weekend's state party convention with a mixed but telling set of results.

One race in particular delivered a headline-making surprise. The biggest jolt came in the contest for Superintendent of Public Instruction, where educator Nichelle Henderson outpaced better-known contenders, including former Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon, to lead the delegate vote. In a field that included seasoned political figures with statewide name recognition, Henderson's strong showing signaled that grassroots appeal and an education-centered message may be resonating more deeply with party activists than traditional political résumés.

Her first-place finish positions her as a candidate to watch as the primary approaches and suggests that delegates are open to elevating new voices over established power players.

Beyond Henderson's breakout performance, other Black candidates saw varying degrees of success that offered an early measure of organizational strength and enthusiasm within party ranks.

In the race for lieutenant governor, former Stockton Mayor Michael Tubbs captured 24% of delegate support in a competitive field. While not enough to dominate the contest, the share reflects a meaningful base of backing among activists and underscores his continued relevance in statewide politics.

Secretary of State Shirley Weber, running unopposed, demonstrated overwhelming party support with 96% of delegate votes. Controller candidate Malia Cohen, also without opposition, secured 95%, reinforcing her strong standing within the party establishment.

The results were more challenging in the race for Insurance Commissioner. Former Sen. Steven Bradford trailed competitors Jane Kim, a former member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and State Sen. Ben Allen (D-Santa Monica) in delegate backing, highlighting the uphill climb he faces in a contest featuring candidates with broader statewide visibility.

Meanwhile, Mike Gipson, running unopposed for Board of Equalization District Three, earned a whopping 80% of delegate support.

Former Alameda County DA Pamela Price Blasts Gubernatorial Hopeful Eric Swalwell Over Racist Video Repost

Former Alameda County District Attorney Pamela Price held a press conference Feb. 21, in San Francisco during the California Democratic Party Convention, calling on party leaders to condemn gubernatorial candidate Eric Swalwell for reposting what she described [as a racist and dehumanizing video](#) of her.

Swalwell currently serves in the U.S. House of Representatives representing California's 14th Congressional District.

Price, who announced Dec. 4, 2025, that she is seeking to reclaim the seat she lost in a 2024 recall election, said Swalwell's decision to share the video with his more than 460,000 social media followers represented "an all-time low in civic discourse."

"It was disparaging enough that the video was first posted on the Internet in 2024, but Congressman Eric Swalwell added insult to injury by reposting it to share with his network," Price said. "To post the statement 'Why dehumanize someone you disagree with? This bigotry doesn't make a point. It sets your point back. Let's do better' while at the same time posting the dehumanizing video, is gaslighting and disingenuous."

Price compared Swalwell's actions to the inflammatory rhetoric of former President Donald Trump, accusing the congressman of engaging in "petty politics disguised as public discourse."

"With this type of poisonous discourse Eric Swalwell is tantamount to Trump," she said. "I agree with Swalwell, 'Let's Do Better.' Let's do better than to have someone like Swalwell who has consistently demonstrated such a lack of character and wisdom leading the 4th largest economy in the world."

Price was joined by members of the party's Black Caucus and Progressive Caucus, who she said were "shocked" by the repost. The news conference called on Democratic leaders to formally denounce the video and Swalwell's decision to amplify it.

Swalwell, a Bay Area congressman and declared candidate for governor, has not publicly responded to Price's remarks as of press time.

California Democratic Lawmakers Reaffirm Commitment to DEI

On Feb. 19, Sen. Lola Smallwood-Cuevas (D-Los Angeles) introduced Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR) 89, a measure affirming California's commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).

“We are California. DEI is in our DNA,” Smallwood-Cuevas said. “We’re proud to stand with our communities, who deserve the dignity and respect that DEI provides.”

The press event, held at the State Capitol, brought together stakeholders focused on social justice, civil rights, and workforce equity. Lawmakers and community advocates presented a united front against efforts in other parts of the country to roll back DEI policies.

SCR 89 passed the Senate the same day on a 29–7 vote. A Senate Concurrent Resolution is approved by both the Senate and Assembly and expresses the joint will or intent of the Legislature. It does not carry the force of law and does not require the governor’s signature.

The resolution urges local, state, and federal policymakers -- as well as educational institutions and private employers -- to uphold DEI principles while protecting constitutional rights and guarding against retaliation.

Among the legislators in attendance were Assemblymembers Mia Bonta (D–Alameda), Chris Ward (D–San Diego), Tina McKinnor (D–Inglewood), Mike Fong (D–Monterey Park), Assembly Majority Leader Cecilia Aguiar-Curry (D–Winters), and Senators María Elena Durazo (D–Los Angeles) and Caroline Menjivar (D–Burbank), all of whom voiced support for SCR 89.

“Today, I’m proud to stand with Sen. Smallwood-Cuevas and my colleagues to reaffirm California’s commitment to uplifting all communities and protecting inclusive educational environments in the

face of federal rollbacks,” said Fong, chair of the California Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Legislative Caucus. “Here in California, when we defend DEI measures, we protect opportunity for students, immigrants, and diverse communities.”

In January 2025, President Donald Trump began dismantling federal DEI programs through a series of executive orders targeting initiatives in federal agencies, the military, and among contractors. He described such programs as “radical” and discriminatory, arguing that opportunity should not be determined by race or sex.

Smallwood-Cuevas said Trump’s actions have cast DEI in a negative light and caused harm in California. She argued that SCR 89 reinforces DEI as foundational to achieving the American Dream.

She also criticized the reported firing of 2,000 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission workers and the closure of civil rights offices, calling the moves detrimental to underrepresented communities.

Lawmakers emphasized that DEI efforts are also vital to people with disabilities, noting that equity ensures access, representation, and meaningful opportunity.

“Addressing structural disparities in our state is essential to California’s survival and prosperity,” Smallwood-Cuevas said.

Emergency Cash: Gov. Newsom Approves \$590 Million Loan to Stabilize Bay Area Transit Agencies

Gov. Gavin Newsom has signed legislation authorizing a \$590 million emergency loan to stabilize Bay Area transit systems, including Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), San Francisco Bay Area Municipal Transportation Commission (MTC), Caltrain and Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (AC) Transit.

The measure allows the California State Transportation Agency to loan funds to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission to help cover operating deficits as agencies continue recovering from steep pandemic-related ridership losses.

“California is stepping up to support Bay Area transit. This agreement will help protect transit service for more than three million monthly riders,” Newsom said. He added that growing ridership, cleaner air and less congestion demonstrate “the benefits of a strong transit system.”

State Transportation Secretary Toks Omishakin called the loan an emergency bridge to maintain reliable service while the region works toward a long-term funding fix.

“This \$590 million emergency loan helps ensure Bay Area communities continue to have reliable service as ridership returns,” he said.

State Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco) said the funding would “avert a traffic catastrophe” and prevent devastating service cuts, describing the agreement as “a major win for securing a bright future for Bay Area public transit.”

Sen. Jesse Arreguín (D-Berkeley) called it “a major victory for our region’s transit operators, workers, and the communities that depend on public transit.”

According to regional leaders, Bay Area commuters take 900,000 daily trips on the transit network.

MTC Chair Sue Noack said the loan “keeps the transit system running smoothly next year,” helping commuters avoid increased congestion.

The loan is structured as a temporary bridge while the region pursues a potential November 2026 ballot measure that would generate new operating funds starting in 2027. Under the agreement, MTC will repay the loan to the state over 12 years, with interest-only payments during the first two years. Repayment will be backed by State Transit Assistance revenues.

The legislation also directs state officials to ensure existing capital projects are not disrupted and requires monitoring of regional transportation funds.

Officials say the emergency financing is designed to stabilize service now while laying groundwork for a more financially resilient transit system in the years ahead.

Rest In Peace: California Leaders Mourn the Passing of the Rev Jesse L. Jackson

Gov. Gavin Newsom, First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom, former U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA-11), and State Sen. Akilah Weber Pierson (D-San Diego) were among a number of California leaders who joined the nation in publicly mourning the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, who died Feb. 17, 2026, at age 84 in Chicago.

Speakers honored him as one of the nation's foremost civil rights leaders and described him as "one of America's greatest civil rights champions" and "a patriot who had the love in his heart to preach a gospel of hope."

In statements dated Feb. 17, the Newsoms highlighted Jackson's decades-long activism and his impact across the country.

"His footprints are found in every civil rights movement in modern history, both as a leader and as a supporter, lending his strength and his spirit to communities around the country," they said in a statement.

The Newsoms noted Jackson's work in California, including standing with farmworkers in the Central Valley, advocating for racial and economic justice in Los Angeles and Oakland, and empowering young voters and activists on campuses throughout the state.

Pelosi reflected on Jackson's national influence, recalling his 1984 Democratic National Convention speech in San Francisco, when he said,

“Our flag is red, white and blue, but our nation is a rainbow, and we’re all precious in God’s sight.”

She praised Jackson for broadening the civil rights movement to include working-class communities, people of color, women, LGBTQ Americans, and others striving for a better future. Pelosi said his life and leadership continue to inspire a new generation of change-makers.

Weber Pierson released a statement honoring Jackson’s legacy, calling him “a relentless advocate for equality and justice whose courage and vision paved the way for progress across our nation and here in California.”

“His legacy lives on in the hope he inspired, the barriers he broke, and the generations he empowered, giving courage to those who believed change was possible because he showed them it was,” Weber Pierson posted.

The leaders emphasized Jackson’s enduring message of fellowship and justice.

“Today, we grieve his loss -- and tomorrow we honor the Reverend by picking up his mantle, by keeping hope alive, and fighting for the world he dreamed of,” the Newsoms said.

Pelosi extended condolences to Jackson's wife, Jackie, and their five children, Santita, former Congressman Jesse Jr., Congressman Jonathan, Yusef, and Jacqueline, while acknowledging the national and global mourning of Jackson's passing.

Jackson, founder of Operation PUSH and the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, ran for president in 1984 and 1988 and spent decades fighting for racial and economic justice.

California Signs Climate Deal With U.K.; Pres. Trump Reacts

Last week, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced a strengthened climate partnership with the United Kingdom, signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with UK Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero Ed Miliband to deepen cooperation on clean energy and sustainable development.

The announcement was followed by a meeting with UK clean-tech company Octopus Energy, which pledged nearly \$1 billion in investments for California projects focused on clean energy, carbon removal, and nature-based solutions.

"California is the best place in America to invest in a clean economy because we set clear goals and we deliver," Newsom said. "Today, we

deepened our partnership with the United Kingdom on climate action and welcomed nearly a billion dollars in clean-tech investment from Octopus Energy.”

Octopus Energy Generation CEO Zoisa North-Bond highlighted California’s strong policy framework and entrepreneurial ecosystem as ideal for long-term investment that benefits both California and the UK economy. The UK government described the partnership as part of its broader mission to cut energy costs, create jobs, and tackle climate change.

Newsom also met with UK Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy to explore expanded collaboration in climate, trade, and business. The California-UK agreement builds on a growing network of international partnerships, including deals with Chile, Colombia, Nigeria, Brazil, Australia, China, Denmark, and Canadian provinces, covering areas such as methane reduction, forest conservation, zero-emission energy, and climate adaptation.

California’s climate leadership extends to global coalitions, including the Under2 Coalition, the Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance, and the Subnational Methane Action Coalition. Domestically, Newsom co-chairs the bipartisan U.S. Climate Alliance and the America Is All In coalition, working with states, cities, tribal nations, and businesses to advance climate goals.

Under Newsom's administration, California has reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 21% since 2000 levels while growing its economy by 81% over the same period. Battery storage has surged to nearly 17,000 megawatts, and in 2023, the state was powered by two-thirds clean energy.

President Trump reacted to the California-U.K. deal by questioning whether a state should enter international climate partnerships, calling the deal "inappropriate" and saying the U.K. "shouldn't be dealing with" Newsom on climate policy. California officials defended the partnership, citing the state's track record of delivering measurable emissions reductions while creating jobs and investment opportunities.

A New Legislative Bloc: Assemblymember Mia Bonta Is Founding Chair of the Children's Caucus

Assemblymember Mia Bonta (D-Alameda) formally launched the California Legislative Children's Caucus (CLCC) on Feb. 17, creating a bipartisan, bicameral bloc dedicated to advancing policies for the state's more than 8 million children. The inaugural caucus includes 40 legislators from both parties who were joined by child advocates at a press conference in Sacramento.

"It's about time California focused on children. That's why we decided to found the California Legislative Children's Caucus," Bonta said.

“Nearly one in every five children in California are living in poverty in the fourth-largest economy in the world. We know that we can do better for our kids.”

The caucus will organize its work around key priorities including childcare access, foster youth, children’s health, education, civic engagement, youth justice, housing security, environmental sustainability, economic security, financial literacy, and overall child welfare.

Several legislators highlighted the importance of child-centered policy. Assemblymember Alex Lee (D-San Jose) said, “By putting California’s children first, the caucus will play a critical role in meeting our youth’s most basic needs, including education, health care, and economic security.”

Assemblymember Robert Garcia (D-Rancho Cucamonga) called children “both our most vulnerable population and our most valuable asset.”

Assemblymember Liz Ortega (D-San Leandro) emphasized that supporting children’s health and futures must be a top priority.

At the launch, Bonta introduced two new bills. Assembly Bill (AB) 1969, the It Takes a Village Act of 2026, proposes the establishment of a

three-year grant program to build and strengthen cradle-to-career networks statewide. AB 1996, the No More Child Poverty Act, aims to cut child poverty in half within 10 years and proposes an 18-member council to track the state's progress.

Other caucus members also shared legislative priorities, including Assemblymember Juan Alanis (R-Modesto), the sponsor of AB 528, which seeks to protect child victims in the legal system.

“As a member of the California Children's Caucus, I am proud to champion AB 528 which safeguards vulnerable child victims from further trauma in our legal system,” Alanis said.

Former State Sen. Steve Bradford Announces New Endorsements of His Campaign for Insurance Commissioner

Former Assemblymember and State Senator Steve Bradford announced a wide-ranging slate of new endorsements in his campaign for California Insurance Commissioner, signaling growing support from local leaders, elected officials, and labor organizations across the state.

“These leaders understand firsthand how insurance impacts families, businesses, and entire communities,” Bradford said. “From homeowners struggling to keep coverage, to cities recovering after disasters, Californians need an Insurance Commissioner who will protect

consumers and stabilize the market. I'm honored to earn the support of leaders who are on the front lines every day.”

Bradford's supporters include mayors, city council members, county supervisors, and school board officials from across California, such as Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, Inglewood Mayor James Butts, Compton Mayor Emma Sharif, Sacramento Sheriff Jim Cooper, and city leaders from Gardena, Lawndale, Carson, Culver City, Torrance, and Victorville. Education leaders also backing Bradford include Tanya Ortiz Franklin of the Los Angeles Unified School District and Sunny Zia of the Long Beach Community College District.

Labor and advocacy groups have joined the coalition as well, according to Bradford's campaign, including Teamsters California, the State Building and Construction Trades Council of California, the International Longshore & Warehouse Union Local 13, and Black Women Organized for Political Action (BWOPA).

State and federal officials endorsing Bradford include U.S. Congressmembers Adam Gray (D-CA-13) and Luz Rivas (D-CA-29), California Treasurer Fiona Ma, Secretary of State Shirley Weber, former Senate President pro Tempore Toni Atkins, and Assembly Speaker Emeritus John A. Pérez.